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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 111213751-2102-02]

RIN 0648-XB118

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific Cod by Catcher Vessels

Using Trawl Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; modification of a closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is opening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to fully use the A season apportionment of the 2012 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to trawl catcher vessels in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), March 29, 2012, through 1200 hrs, A.l.t., April 1, 2012. Comments must be received at the following address no later than 4:30 p.m., A.l.t., [insert date 15 days after date of filing for public inspection with the OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2012-0073, by any one of the following methods:

- Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal www.regulations.gov. To submit comments via the e-Rulemaking

Portal, first click the “submit a comment” icon, then enter NOAA-NMFS-2012-0073 in the keyword search. Locate the document you wish to comment on from the resulting list and click on the “Submit a Comment” icon on that line.

- Mail: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.
- Fax: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Fax comments to 907-586-7557.
- Hand delivery to the Federal Building: Address written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Deliver comments to 709 West 9th Street, Room 420A, Juneau, AK.

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NMFS. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to

remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word or Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the GOA exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

NMFS closed directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI under § 679.20(d)(1)(iii) on February 29, 2012 (77 FR 13013, March 5, 2012).

As of March 21, 2012, NMFS has determined that approximately 3,000 metric tons of Pacific cod remain in the 2012 A season directed fishing allowance allocated to trawl catcher vessels in the BSAI. Therefore, in accordance with § 679.25(a)(1)(i), (a)(2)(i)(C), and (a)(2)(iii)(D), and to fully utilize the A season apportionment of the 2012 Pacific cod TAC allocated to trawl catcher vessels in the BSAI, NMFS is terminating the previous closure and is reopening directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI.

The Administrator, Alaska Region (Regional Administrator) considered the following factors in reaching this decision: (1) the current catch for Pacific cod by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI and, (2) the harvest capacity and stated intent on future harvesting patterns of vessels in participating in this fishery.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the opening of directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet and processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of March 21, 2012.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

Without this inseason adjustment, NMFS could not allow Pacific cod fishery by catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI to be harvested in an expedient manner and in accordance with the regulatory schedule. Under § 679.25(c)(2), interested persons are invited to submit written comments on this action to the above address until [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF FILING FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

This action is required by § 679.25 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: March 26, 2012

Emily H. Menashes,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2012-7583 Filed 03/26/2012 at 4:15 pm; Publication Date: 03/30/2012]